On their own, Chuck Wood, Ted E. Bear and friends are

LIVING

WHEN a young David Strassman announced he preferred playing with dolls to going to medical school, his father was a little disappointed.

But now that Strassman is one of the world's top ventriloquists, his dad happily admits he was wrong about David's career choice.

"My father was a doctor and he wanted me to be a doctor, too," says Strassman, who lives in Los Angeles.

"But it meant 10 years of school after high school. I just looked at that, and said, 'No way'.

"Dad was unsupportive when I quit college and started acting. It wasn't until I started doing major TV shows that he said, 'Okay, you've made it', and gave me his blessing."

Strassman's one-man, seven-puppet show is touring Australia and audiences here, as in the U.S., love his cute Ted E. Bear puppet, and they love to hate the star of the show, Chuck Wood. There's also baby Ricky, Zatar the alien, and triceratop dinosaurs Herbie, Kerby and Bob.

Rude, foul-mouthed Chuck was Strassman's first character when he started puppetry 15 years ago

Strassman says Chuck's nasty, vindictive personality is the result of years of living with the knowledge that he's not a human being.

"He knows he's a just a puppet and he hates that – he wants to be real, like Pinnochio."

Chuck hurls abuse at other puppets and has a dreadful reputation for being lecherous.

He lived up to this reputation when he met former Chances star Danielle Fairclough at TV WEEK's photographic studio.

While Danielle, 19, at first insisted she couldn't speak to a doll, she was soon reacting to Chuck's charms. She admits, however, that her heart belongs to another.

"I love Ted E. Bear," she says. "That bear is a legend!"

When Strassman's manager suggested he introduce a teddy bear character to his show, he didn't think much of the idea.

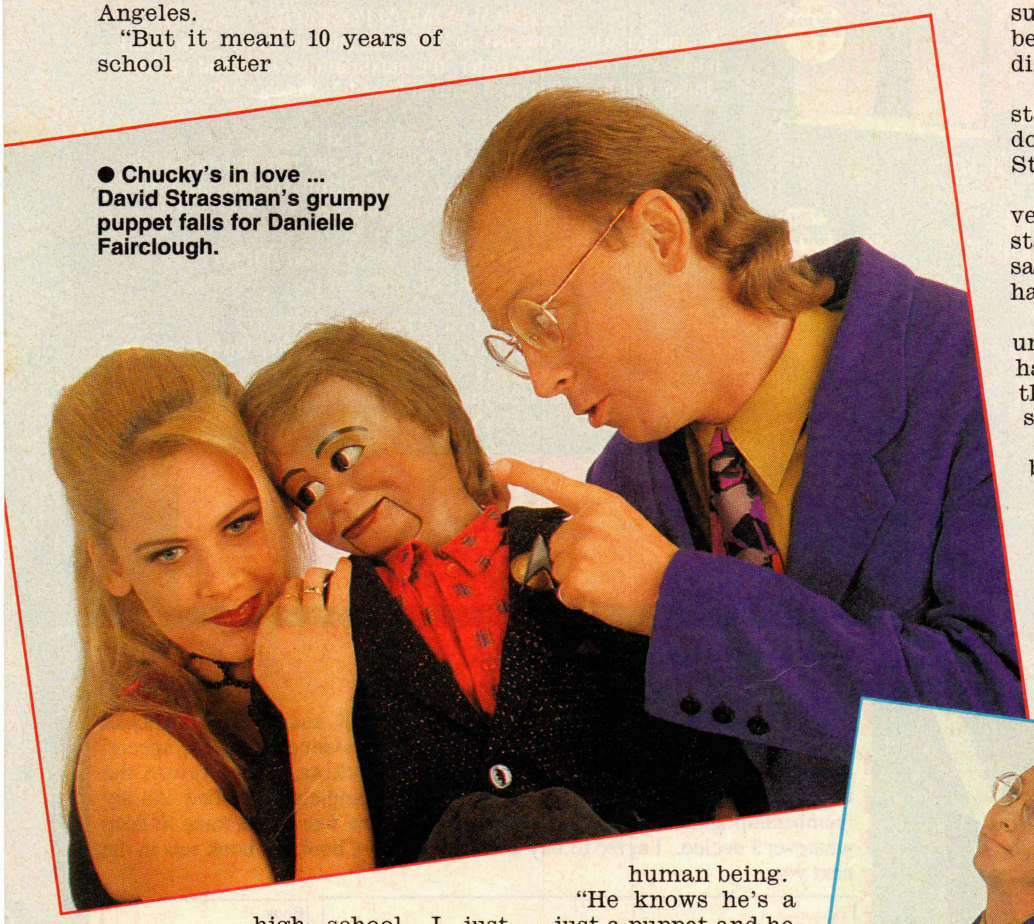
"I told him, 'I'm not going on stage with a teddy bear. What do you think I am?'" Strassman says.

"Finally, I agreed and the very first time I walked on stage with Ted the audience said, 'Awwww!' and I knew I had a winner."

Strassman's puppets have a unique personality. They also have another attraction in that they can come to life, seemingly on their own.

Strassman has combined his interest in computer science engineering with robotics and state-of-the-art animatronics to create a special breed of puppet.

He can operate Chuck from a distance of 1.5km



● **Chucky's in love ... David Strassman's grumpy puppet falls for Danielle Fairclough.**



● **... but Danielle has already given her heart to Ted E. Bear ... "That bear is a legend!"**

just dummies. Add David Strassman, and they become...

DOLLS!



without using remote-control cables. Zatar the alien puppet was created with help from the special-effects team which worked on the movies Hook and Cocoon and the television series Freddy's Nightmares.

Strassman's family of living dolls is worth a small fortune.

"Let's just say I could have bought a beautiful house in Los Angeles with the money these puppets have cost," he says.

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